

Feb. 25-26

2026

Reclaiming Profitability: Farming Smarter in

Albert Lea, MN

ProfitProAG

## Speaker Profile: Tom Cotter

Tom Cotter is one of Minnesota's most recognized voices in regenerative agriculture, and we are excited to welcome him back to both the 2025 Winter Conference and the Nutrient Management School. A fourth-generation farmer from Austin, Minnesota, Tom has spent more than 25 years transforming his family's operation through cover crops, reduced tillage, livestock integration, and a deep commitment to soil biology. His practical, experience-driven approach resonated strongly with attendees last year, and his influence has only grown since then.

Tom's journey into regenerative farming began in the late 1990s, when he and his father started experimenting with cover crops on land that had been tilled continuously since 1874. As he recalls from those early years, "The soil always smelled dead and stale... When we started doing cover crops, I realized, 'Wow, this soil smells good.'"

That moment of contrast sparked a long-term shift in how the Cotter farm approached soil stewardship. Over time, Tom combined reduced tillage, diverse cover crop mixes, and livestock grazing to rebuild soil structure, increase biological activity, and improve nutrient cycling. The results were unmistakable: more earthworms, better water infiltration, healthier crops, and a more resilient farming system.

The transition wasn't always easy. As the attached document notes, Tom and his father "had their share of failures, but there were few resources available to help them." Many agronomists told him cover crops wouldn't work in his region. But Tom persisted, learning through trial, observation, and collaboration with other early adopters. His willingness to experiment — and to share both successes and failures — has made him a trusted voice for farmers who want to improve soil health without sacrificing profitability.

In recognition of his leadership, Tom was named the 2025 Minnesota Leopold Conservation Award winner, one of the most respected honors in American agriculture. This award celebrates land stewards who demonstrate responsible, innovative, and enduring conservation practices — a perfect reflection of Tom's work and philosophy.

Over the past year, Tom has expanded his speaking schedule, presenting at events across Minnesota, Iowa, and the broader Midwest. His message is grounded, honest, and rooted in real-world experience. He speaks not as a theorist, but as a farmer who has lived the challenges and rewards of regenerative agriculture.

We are thrilled to have Tom contributing to both of our February events:

### Soil Health & Nutrient Management School

Tom will teach regenerative soil health strategies that integrate crops and livestock, focusing on how biological activity drives nutrient availability and long-term fertility. He will also co-present with Ray Archuleta on designing effective cover crop mixes and blends, offering practical guidance on species selection, timing, and management for different soil types and cropping systems.



## **Winter Conference**

Tom will join our grower panel, sharing insights from his own operation and discussing how he evaluates success, adapts to changing conditions, and continues to refine his system. His perspective adds depth and real-world context to the broader discussions on soil health, nutrient efficiency, and farm profitability.

Tom's story is one of curiosity, persistence, and a willingness to rethink long-held assumptions. His work demonstrates that regenerative agriculture is not just an environmental choice — it's a practical, profitable path forward for farmers who want healthier soils, more resilient crops, and long-term sustainability.

We're honored to welcome him back and look forward to the knowledge, inspiration, and practical tools he'll bring to this year's events.